

Researching the history of a war memorial



War Memorials Trust

There are two elements of a war memorial that can be researched - the physical object and those commemorated by the memorial. This helpsheet provides advice on the researching of the war memorial itself.

Why undertake research?

Uncovering the history of a war memorial, who built it, how it was funded, why it is located where it is, is fascinating and important. Understanding these issues will help to manage the memorial.

For example, when a memorial was erected decisions were made by those involved about who was recorded. This varies, some committees had only those born in a town, whilst others anyone who lived there, and some included civilians whilst others did not. As war memorials continue to be used as missing names are uncovered or names are added from current conflicts, then knowing the original criteria for the names can help the custodian make a decision now - they may choose to adapt the original criteria but understanding the original intent can be useful.

What can you find out?

- **Dates**

When was the war memorial built and dedicated? Have any additions or changes been made to the memorial (e.g. the addition of Second World War names) and when?

- **People**

Who led the campaign to erect the war memorial and who contributed to it? Who designed the memorial and who built it? Who unveiled or dedicated it? Who was at the dedication?

- **Design and materials**

What is the war memorial built of? What are the different components made of? What type of war memorial is it? Why was this design chosen?

- **Inscription**

What is the inscription on the war memorial? Are there names on it? Which conflicts are commemorated? Does it continue to function as a war memorial today?

- **Location**

Where is the war memorial? Why is it located there? Was land given specifically for the memorial or does the site have special significance?

- **Ownership**

Who has had/now has responsibility for the maintenance and preservation of the memorial?

- **Maintenance**

Has any maintenance/restoration/relocation work ever been carried out on the memorial?

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Carrying out the research

Sources of information are primarily local as, for the majority of war memorials, the local community made decisions about its own memorial. The local community may be geographical or based on a workplace, place of worship, school or social group. Research will need to be focussed on that community.

- **Council/parochial church council/school Governor meeting minutes and company/social group records**

If a war memorial is located on public land, in a church or in church grounds (or other place of worship), in a school or in school grounds, or in the premises of a specific company or social group (e.g. scouts, cadets, etc) then minutes from council, parochial church council, school Governor, or company meetings may include further information about the war memorial. In addition, it may have been necessary to apply for permission to erect the war memorial (e.g. planning permission, a faculty from church authorities, etc) and this may be recorded.

- **Local newspapers**

If there is a local newspaper which dates back to the time of the erection of the war memorial, then the coverage of fundraising attempts and, in particular, the dedication ceremony is normally extremely detailed and useful.

- **Local archives/libraries/museums**

These may hold information about the war memorial or records which feature the memorial (e.g. photographs of the village through the years which feature the war memorial).

- **War Memorial Register**

The Inventory aims to compile a comprehensive record of all war memorials in the UK and may hold some historical information about the war memorial (c/o Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ, T: 020 7207 9851, E: memorials@iwm.org.uk, W: <http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/search>).

Please note that it is not always possible to uncover original records about war memorials. However, in most cases, some information is available but not often in the most obvious place!

What to do with your research

- **Inform the current custodian**

Ensure that the current custodian of the war memorial has a copy of your research or is aware that you have the information.

- **Share with the community**

Think about how you might be able to share your research with the local community, e.g. giving talks to local groups or writing an article for the local newspaper.

- **Expand your research**

You could continue your research of the war memorial by researching the actual memorial. Please see War Memorials Trust's 'Researching the names on a war memorial' helpsheet for further information.

- **Inform the War Memorial Register**

If the details the Inventory already holds are limited, then your research could be added to it.

Please note that this helpsheet is intended to offer informal advice and is a distillation of experience. The information contained in this helpsheet is not exhaustive and other sources of information are available.